IN THE CLAIMS

Claims 1 - 18 and 33 - 76 (Withdrawn)

Claims 19 - 32 (Canceled)

Claims 77 - 90 (Allowed)

91. (Currently amended) A diagnostic system, in kit form, comprising, in an amount sufficient to perform ~~at least one~~an assay, the composition of [an]a recombinant HCV capsid antigen ~~according to Claim 32~~wherein said composition is essentially free of procaryotic antigens and other HCV-related proteins.

92. (Currently amended) A method of assaying a body fluid sample for the presence of antibodies against an HCV capsid antigen which comprises:

a) forming an immunoreaction admixture by admixing said body fluid sample with a composition of Claim [32]91;

b) maintaining said immunoreaction admixture for a time period sufficient for any of said antibodies present to immunoreact with said HCV capsid antigen to form an immunoreaction product; and

c) detecting the presence of any of said immunoreaction product formed and thereby the presence of said antibodies.

93. (Currently amended) The method of Claim [36]92, wherein said specific binding agent is Protein A or at least one of the antibodies anti-human IgG and anti-human IgM.

94. (Currently amended) The method of Claim [36]92, wherein said label is lanthanide chelate, biotin, an enzyme, a radioactive isotope or a fluorescent moiety.

95. (Previously withdrawn) A recombinant expression vector comprising a first nucleic acid having the sequence AGGAGGGTTTTTCAT operatively linked to a second nucleic acid consisting of a nucleotide sequence which encodes an HCV nonstructural 794 antigen having the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO:16 or the corresponding sequence from a different HCV strain.

96. (Currently amended) The vector of Claim [39]95, wherein said expression vector is pGEX7 comprising said first nucleic and second nucleic acids.

97. (Currently amended) The vector of Claim [40]96, wherein said vector is pGEX-NS3-794.

98. (Currently amended) A procaryotic host cell comprising an expression vector of Claim [39]95.

99. (Currently amended) A method of producing an HCV nonstructural 794 antigen which comprises

(a) treating a host cell comprising an expression vector of Claim [39]95 under conditions and for a time effective to express said antigen; and

(b) recovering said antigen.

100. (Currently amended) A recombinant HCV nonstructural 794 antigen produced by the method of Claim [43]99.

101. (Currently amended) A composition comprising a recombinant HCV nonstructural 794 antigen of Claim [44]100, wherein said composition is essentially free of procaryotic antigens and other HCV-related proteins.

102. (Currently amended) A diagnostic system, in kit form, comprising, in an amount sufficient to perform an assay, the composition of an HCV nonstructural 794 antigen according to Claim [45]101.

103. (Currently amended) A method of assaying a body fluid sample for the presence of antibodies against an HCV nonstructural 794 antigen which comprises:

a) forming an immunoreaction admixture by admixing said body fluid sample with a composition of Claim [45]101;

b) maintaining said immunoreaction admixture for a time period sufficient for any of said antibodies present to immunoreact with said HCV nonstructural 794 antigen to form an immunoreaction product; and

c) detecting the presence of any of said immunoreaction product formed and thereby the presence of said antibodies.

104. (Currently amended) The method of Claim [49]103, wherein said specific binding agent is Protein A or at least one of the antibodies anti-human IgG and anti-human IgM.

105. (Currently amended) The method of Claim [49]103, wherein said label is lanthanide chelate, biotin, an enzyme, a radioactive isotope or a fluorescent moiety.

106. (Currently amended) A composition comprising a recombinant HCV capsid antigen consisting of amino acids 1-120 and a recombinant HCV nonstructural 794 antigen consisting of amino acids of SEQ ID NO:16, or the corresponding sequence from another HCV strain, wherein said composition is essentially free of procaryotic antigens and other HCV-related proteins.

107. (Currently amended) The composition of Claim [65]106 wherein said recombinant HCV capsid antigen consists of amino acids 1-120 of SEQ ID NO:8.

108. (Currently amended) The composition of Claim [65]106 wherein said recombinant HCV nonstructural 794 antigen consists of amino acids of SEQ ID NO:16.

109. (Currently amended) The composition of Claim [66]107 wherein said recombinant HCV nonstructural 794 antigen consists of amino acids of SEQ ID NO:16.

110. (Currently amended) The composition of Claim [65]106, wherein the ratio by

weight of said capsid antigen to said nonstructural antigen is in a range of about 8:1 to about 1:1.

111. (Currently amended) The composition of Claim [68]109, wherein the ratio by weight of said capsid antigen to said nonstructural antigen is in a range of about 8:1 to about 1:1.

112. (Currently amended) A diagnostic system, in kit form, comprising, in an amount sufficient to perform an assay, the composition of any one of claims ~~65, 68, 69 or 70~~106, 109, 110 or 111.

113. (Currently amended) A method of assaying a body fluid sample for the presence of antibodies against an HCV capsid antigen or an HCV nonstructural antigen, which method comprises:

a) forming an immunoreaction admixture by admixing said body fluid sample with a composition of any one of claims ~~65,68,69 or 70~~106, 109, 110 or 111;

b) maintaining said immunoreaction admixture for a time period sufficient for any of said antibodies present to immunoreact with one or more of said antigens to form an immunoreaction product; and

c) detecting the presence of any of said immunoreaction product formed and thereby the presence of said antibodies.

114. (Currently amended) The method of Claim [74]113, wherein said specific binding agent is Protein A, or at least one of the antibodies anti-human IgG and anti-human IgM.

115. (Currently amended) The method of Claim [74]113, wherein said label is lanthanide chelate, biotin, an enzyme, a radioactive isotope or a fluorescent moiety.